"European Commission Cabinet Advisers and Policy Making"

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Abstract

Scholarly attention on political advisers has grown steadily in recent years. Research has focused on issues of accountability, core executive studies, policy work and classification of policy making roles, as well as the role of advisers as the third prominent party in the politics administration interface. While empirical research on national administrative systems, especially Westminster ones, has increased, we know less on those individual agents in ministerial cabinet systems, and very little in supranational administrations, especially the EU. The aim of the proposed paper is to investigate the policy making roles of advisers in European Commissioners' cabinets. Who are those actors and what do they do? Are they a case of agents active in a politicised policy advisory system, such as the ones found in ministerial cabinets or is their involvement in the policy process more in line with the particularities of the European Commission politico-administrative context? To answer those questions we put forward a comparative study design and a mixed data collection method, using both a survey questionnaire and interviews. The study shows that the EC cabinet system shares important similarities, but also differences with national ministerial cabinet systems. EC cabinets work as 'professional offices' in a supranational politico-administrative setting that is significantly less politicised and conflictual than in national ministerial cabinet systems. EC advisers appear to be politically aware experts, though not necessarily specialists, who indulge both in the technical, as well as the steering side of policy, while their policy advice activities have a strong horizontal, intra-executive, but also governance dimension.

Keywords: political advisers, ministerial advisers, policy advisers, ministerial cabinet systems, policy advisory systems, ministerial advisers, political staff

Introduction

While in many Western-European countries the ascend of political advisers is a relatively recent phenomenon, in countries with ministerial cabinet systems such as France, Belgium, Greece, Italy, and Portugal there is a tradition of engaging ministerial cabinets, as the structural interfaces between politics and administration. Ministerial cabinets comprise numerous political advisers who as trustees of the minister are in a superior position in relation to the senior civil service, and constantly put pressure on the civil servants in order to ensure political responsiveness. The

ministerial advisers are endowed with crucial policy-making roles and in some cases colonise all stages of the policy process. In comparison, the career civil servants at the top of the administration in some cases, is considered to be marginalized in the policy-making process.

It has been argued that the exception to this rule is the European Commission (Kassim et al 2013, Wille 2013, Bauer and Ege 2013). There seems to be wide agreement that the 1999 Prodi - Kinnock reform of the Commission administration normalised relations between the EC cabinets and the Commission high civil service by redefining the roles of cabinets and drawing "sharper lines of responsibility between cabinets and services" (Wille 2013, p. 98). This was argued to be the result of the establishment of codes of conduct, the denationalisation of cabinet composition and the reduction of the recruitment and selection powers of EC cabinets. As Bauer and Ege (2013, p.193) argued at the start of the millennium, the Kinnock reform, which implemented crucial changes in strategic and personnel management, led to "an ever less politicised Commission administration, in an ever more politicised organisational context". The Commission today pays more attention on effective management of the policy making process, as it is "focused on delivering a Europe of results" (Wille 2013, p. 116).

The above findings make the Commission the only cabinet system with apparently non-conflictual politico-administrative relations. The contribution in hand makes use of a work in progress on the policy analytical roles of EC cabinet advisers to analyse the roles and particularly the policy making roles of those agents. It is innovative in two ways. First, following Bauer and Ege's (2013, p. 178) suggestion, the current contribution aims to refocus scholarly interest away from national administrations to a supranational administration, where attention on many issues has been arguably scarce. Second, much like Wille (2013, p. 97-119) has done in his study of *chefs de cabinet*, we too focus on the role of individuals, departing from traditional analyses of cabinet structures, as well as analyses of the politico-administrative interface (Cini 2006, Donelly 1993, Donelly and Ritchie 1994, Ritchie 1992, Kassim et al 2013). The focus here is on EC core cabinet advisers' policy making roles and activities. These are the actors who perform policy advisory work within the EC cabinet structure. They are the cabinet insiders. The question here is what is the nature and role, particularly the policy making role of those agents? To what extent is the ministerial cabinet system impacting upon EC advisers' work? And what can be said of their work within the EC cabinet politico-administrative context?

Our overall disciplinary objective here is to catch up with empirical and theoretical developments deriving from work on advisers carried out on Westminster systems. We achieve this in two ways. First, we contextualise advisers' work by describing the EC cabinet system and presenting similarities and differences with other such systems. Second, we assess and classify EC cabinet advisers' involvement in policy making, using existing typologies from the relevant literature.

In order to achieve our research goal we collected data through questionnaires and interviews with EC core cabinet advisers. As the research is a work in progress with more questionnaires and interviews expected, the present paper presents the preliminary findings, based on data collected till mid July 2014. Not disregarding the two exploratory interviews with one Commissioner and a Policy Assistant, the data in hand refer to a sample of 16 advisers, who completed the questionnaire survey, three of who also gave us a follow up interview.

We present our material as follows. First, we present our theoretical and methodological framework. We then proceed to describe the context in which advisers operate: the cabinet and its relation with the high civil service, the European Commission Director Generals and Directors. Third, we map EC advisers' policy making roles. Finally, we conclude with a summary and discussion of our findings.

2. Theory and methods

2.1 Theory

The analysis of the policy role of political advisers is ridden with certain challenges. The first such challenge relates to the fact that when we examine "the policy role of partisan staff there are elements of both individual agency and structure to consider" (Maley 2013, p.2). Except for influential actors, advisers can also be seen through the lens of the functions of the institutions in which they are embedded, or the networks and groups of which they are members. To put it simply, the context and location of their work matters. Indeed, it is not possible to treat advisers in isolation (James (2007, p. 9). Their work is conditioned by the functions of the civil servants alongside whom they work. Three models have been suggested: a) advisers work alongside a neutral civil service (Westminster systems, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands), b) advisers work alongside a civil service, where the bureaucracy's top tier is also politicised (Spain and the Slovak Republic), c) advisers work in ministerial cabinets (France, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Portugal and increasingly Spain) (James 2007, p. 9, OECD 2011, p. 23). The EC cabinet advisers belongs clearly to the latter case. In ministerial cabinet systems we would expect advisers' policy roles to be streamlined with what appears in the literature to be certain major ministerial cabinet system functions: intra-executive coordination, expertise in the sense of establishing "brain trusts" that pool expertise together, flexibility in terms of organisation, loyalty, technical expertise combined with political feasibility (Walgrave et al 2007, p. 9, De Winter 1981, p. 66, Brans and Steen 2007). Equally, we would also expect to observe cabinet advisers' roles being associated with certain dysfunctions ministerial cabinet systems project, such as conflictual politico-administrative relations due to their partito-cratic functions, rampant politicisation, partisan affiliations and an embedded culture of mistrust of the civil service (Walgrave et al 2007, Erally 2001, Vancoppenolle 2011).

The second challenge in studying advisers' policy roles reflects the nature and dimension of the policy work those actors undertake: a) advisers undertake multiple tasks, b) their policy work is highly variable and c) their work can also be highly contigent (Maley 2013, p. 1,2,3). It is for this reason that many scholars reject the classification of the policy work of advisers using types, on the basis of surveys that aggregate responses in order to rank and weight aspects of advisers' work (Maley 2013, p.2). Not disregarding the merits of such an approach, our argument here is that the use of classifications allows us to escape the fallacy of a non-comparative, "atheoretical" study. Classification is a "necessary component of systematic comparison", though, of a higher level than contextual description, since "it seeks to group many separate descriptive entities into simpler categories" (Landman 2003, p. 4, 34). In the present study, we classify advisers according to Connaughton's (2010a, 2010b) four types. This is the first, and up to today most established, scholarly attempt to classify advisers' policy making roles.

According to Connaughton (2010a, 2010b) there are four types of adviser: Type I is the expert, who is a specialist, politically passive, works on a specific policy field using knowledge, the impact of his work being expertise. Type II is the partisan who is responsive to the minister's mission, highly political in all dimensions and closely associated with the minister, his impact being political dominance. Type III is the coordinator who is a generalist, politically variable (active or passive), provides oversight to the government program and acts as a fixer, his impact being management. Type IV is the minder who is a generalist but also responsive to the Minister. Unlike the Partisan who is a 'party apparatchik', the Minder is the minister's bodyguard (Connaughton 2010a, p. 63) politically active, looking "for issues potentially harmful" to the political executive (Connaughton 2010b, p. 351-352). The impact of the minder is mutuality. Figure 1 below depicts the four types and their characteristics.

Figure 1: Characteristics of advisers roles. Source Connaughton (2010b, p. 352)

Role	Profile	Political	Communicate	Policy-making role	Impact
Expert	Specialist	Passive	Technical	Knowledge	Expertise
Partisan	Responsive	Active	Political	Politics	Political dominance
Coordinator	Generalist	Variable	Both	Fixer	Management
Minder	Generalist/ responsive	Active	Political	Politics/passive	Mutuality

Arguably, Connaughton's (2010a, 2010b) typology is not without problems. Some of these have been summarised by Craft (2011). First, advisers' roles appear to be overlapping and not exclusive. Second, there is no consideration of the horizontal and vertical dimension of advice, though Connaughton (2010b) does analyse her data along a horizontal and vertical dimension. Third, there is no focus on the content of advice. Fourth, there is no understanding of the exact stage of the policy cycle where advisers' role is more prominent. Overall Craft (2011) argued that there is a need for greater specificity. This specificity can be pursued either through an alternative typology or by simply focusing on covering the above mentioned gaps. Craft (2011) did suggest an alternative classification of policy advise giving activities along substantive and procedural lines (Craft 2011). The substantive dimension refers to the nature of policy advice activity and it is discerned between technical/administrative and partisan advice. The procedural dimension refers to the horizontality of policy advice giving activities and it is discerned between vertical (intradepartmental) and horizontal (inter-departmental / governance).

Figure 2: Adviser policy advice activity. Source Craft (2011)

Procedural (dimension of policy advice activity)	**Substantive** (nature of policy advice contribution)	
	ADMINISTRATIVE	PARTISAN
HORIZONTAL	Type I Administrative Horizontal	Type II Partisan Horizontal
VERTICAL	Type III Administrative Vertical	Type IV Partisan Vertical

However, this typology never took off, and attention was refocused more on classifications according to content of advice, rather than policy roles (Craft and Howlett 2012). Moreover, as it has been recently argued, despite being a commendable classification, it projected many more limitations than the original Connaughton (2010a, 2010b) one (Gouglas 2013a, 2013b, 2014). In

particular, trying to avoid overlapping and non-exclusive roles it created ideal types into which empirical data proved difficult to fit without losing even more specificity.

Staying within the realm of policy advisory roles, then, there are two immediate ways in which one can cover some of the gaps evident in Connaughton's typology, and as a result achieve an even more systematic interpretation of advisers' policy advice activity. First, following Craft's (2011) suggestion, adviser's policy work can be located in the policy cycle heuristic. Howlett, Ramesh and Perl (Howlett et al 2009) point to five stages of the policy cycle: i) agenda setting, ii) policy formulation, iii) decision making, iv) policy implementation, v) policy evaluation. We will be using those in order to locate at which stage EC cabinet advisers' work is more prominent. Second, greater attention needs to be paid to the dimension of advisers' policy advice giving activities. We argue in this paper that the best way to achieve a deeper understanding of the dimension of advisers' policy work is by employing Maley's (2013) concept of three arenas. According to Maley (2013, p.1) "it is useful to understand the policy work of partisan staff as occurring in three different arenas: working with the department; working with other ministers (within the political executive) and working with stakeholders". In each of the above arenas advisers' roles have a different character and purpose. In some of them policy activities are part of a core part of advisers' work, arising from the institutional dynamics and context in which this work is embedded. In others, advisers' work is seen as an opportunity, rather than as responsibility. In the case of Australia, the first and second arenas come up as core policy work dimensions. Working with the department means supervising, orienting and mobilising departments, generating ideas, developing and implementing policy. Working within the executive means facilitating decision making, resolving policy conflict and coordinating new policy. The third arena comes up as more of an opportunity rather than as a responsibility. This is where ideas are linked to interests and opportunities, mobilisation and bargaining in terms of building political support takes place, and policy is delivered (Maley 2013, p. 4-15). Given that intra-executive co-ordination is an important function of ministerial cabinet systems we would expect the first and second arenas to be the loci of the core part of advisers' policy roles.

2.2 Methods

The present contribution was designed as a single case comparative study focusing on the European Commission. It is comparative, not only thanks to the use of classifications, which allow for meaningful comparisons across systems, but also because we do actually draw direct comparisons with other ministerial cabinet systems. The focus of the study is both institutional, as well as individual. Data on contextual information (institutional focus) regarding EC cabinets was collected using primary documents, and secondary scholarly analyses. Interviews were used to corroborate findings existing in the bibliography. However, our main focus and unit of observation has been the European Commission cabinet adviser (individual focus). Data on advisers were collected in two stages. First, we took a snapshot of the official internet profiles of advisers employed during the February - May 2014 period, just before the end of this Commission's term in office. This allowed us to get an initial picture of certain fundamental parameters of this population, such as official position in the Cabinet, gender balance, average total cabinet staff size, average core cabinet size, total EC cabinet staff employed. Parallel to this, we proceeded with two exploratory, non-recorded informational interviews in April 2014 with one Commissioner and one policy assistant. The choice was made simply on the basis of access. The second and main stage of our data collection started in the aftermath of the European Parliament elections. In mid June 2014 we distributed our questionnaire through personal email to 135 EC Cabinet advisers. Out of 229 core cabinet advisers, they were the only ones with public emails. Nine Commission cabinets do not provide the emails of their members publicly. The questionnaire, comprising 19 closed and open questions, is similar to the one distributed for the research on Greek ministerial advisers (Gouglas 2013a, 2031b, 2014).

The idea behind this is to make the findings between advisers across ministerial cabinet systems more directly comparable. The intention is to replicate this questionnaire also to Belgian advisers. Till mid July 2014, 16 EC cabinet advisers had completed the questionnaire and three of them gave us access for interviews. The three interviews were recorded. As this is a work in progress, more completed questionnaires and interviews are expected and already coming through. The sample in hand in this paper comprises 16 advisers, of 14 different nationalities, 9 female, 7 male, out of which one 'Head of Cabinet', 3 'Deputy Heads', 2 'Advisers' and 10 'Members of Cabinet'. They represent 8 different Commissioner cabinets. 12 out 16 of the samples' advisers have previous policy work experience in the EU institutions, out of whom 10 in the European Commission. They are all highly educated with 12 of them at master and 3 at PhD level. Their major field of education is law (7), and political science (4). Some of our sample's advisers (3) have a combination of study fields: engineering with political science and economics, political science with economics, economics with law.

3. The European Commission cabinet

The European Commission cabinets form part of a supranational executive with certain characteristics that make it unique in comparison to national executives and administrations (Donelly 1993, p. 74-75). The members of the College of Commissioners are not elected in direct elections on the basis of a specific political program, though there is increasing pressure for this to change, as we witnessed in the 2014 European Parliament elections, where candidates selected by the European Political Parties run for the Commission Presidency. Moreover, the Commission is not characterised by a particular political ideology, as most political parties would understand the term, while there is no party organisation or central political patronage mechanism cementing government cohesion, as is the case at the national levels (Donelly 1993, p. 74-75). Added to those executive government features, the Commission administration is often portrayed as deeply fragmented (Cram 1994). Fragmentation is the result of deep coordination deficits, which are based on the inherent characteristics of each level of organization: on the one hand, DGs are thought to form small 'fiefdoms', accomplishing their duties in an introspective way and pursuing their own agendas; on the other hand, the Commission is composed of persons with no shared background, ideology or sense of common fate to bind them. In view of this, the majority of studies acknowledge the particular politico/administrative context and the hybrid character of the Commission as an organisation (Peterson 2006). Keeping this in mind we proceed with locating EC advisers within their institutional habitat, the EC cabinet.

3.1 From Hallstein to Prodi: from private, to political to professional offices

In 1958 the new European Commission (EC) established private offices for the Commissioners, following the pattern of the French ministerial cabinets (Ritchie 1994, p. 98). Such offices had already been in use by the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), having been encouraged by Jean Monnet as institutions that could promote a dynamic and fluid system of policy advice (Ritchie 1994, p. 99). However, the very idea that "every commissioner should have the support of a small personally appointed staff" was initially proposed by Emile Noel, the first EC Secretary-General (Cini 1996, p. 112). The logic behind this proposal was the improvement of both horizontal and vertical co-ordination within the Commission (Cini 1994, p. 112). Indeed, as the policy competences of the EU grew in the 1960s, Cabinets became an "important mechanism for co-ordinating policy within the Commission" (Donelly and Ritchie 1994, p. 42). Planning and co-ordination was indeed the main focus of cabinets in the 1970s and early 1980s (Cini 1996, p. 115) Beyond co-ordination, though, it has been argued that EC cabinets were "originally created to emphasize the political role the Commission was to play in the creation of European political Union" (Cini 1996, p. 115). In his attempt to foster a European identity, the first

Commission President, Hallstein, expected all Commissioners to maintain a high profile and visit member states accompanied by their members of cabinet, while "on occasion, [they] sent their cabinet members as delegates" (Donelly and Ritchie 1994, p. 41). More importantly, cabinets became "increasingly instrumental in building policy majorities and package deals across Community institutions and with the Member States" (Cini 1996, p. 115). This was particularly evident in framing the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). As Donelly and Ritchie (1994, p. 42) argued it became "particularly apparent in the early years of the Community that for a policy to be successful it had to be vigorously negotiated with politicians, civil servants and interested parties in the Member States".

It goes without saying that with the establishment of cabinets came along a series of problems associated with typical cabinet system drawbacks. The **first** such challenge was cabinet size. At first, under pressure from Commission President Hallstein, it was agreed to keep the cabinets small, at four persons: two members plus a secretary and a typist (Donelly and Ritchie 1994, p. 42), whereas the President's cabinet would consist of four advisers and two secretaries. By 1972 the average cabinet staff number increased from an average of four to fourteen, out of which six in high administrative grade. By 1995 cabinet size reached seventeen, of which nine in high grade. In total, in 1995 the Community budget allowed for 310 staff for 20 cabinets (Cini 1996, p. 113). Beyond size, a **second** problem that came to the fore was political pressure, exercised due to national affiliation of cabinet members. EC cabinets were often identified as 'British' or 'German'. This occurred despite conventions to employ at least one non-national member of cabinet, (Cini 1996, p. 113). The increasing importance of nationality and national allegiance reflected in cabinets was one of the factors leading to a **third** challenge, that of politico-administrative friction. One issue of course was the presence of different working practices among members of cabinet and Director Generals of differing nationality (Cini 1996, p. 114). A broader issue had been the very functions of cabinets and how those impacted on the Commission administration. In relation to their national liaison function, "the cabinet became a pressure point for national interests and a focus for the accommodation of national and Community interest" (Ritchie 1994, p. 103). In relation to their policy advice and co-ordination function there was "an increasing pressure [to the Commission DGs] to achieve a consensus on policy issues" (Ritchie 1994, p. 103). Even in the field of promotions and appointments of DG officials, the early cabinets played a crucial role in trying to get their nationals placed in the right jobs (Ritchie 1994, p. 103). The situation did not fundamentally change, not even after the introduction of competitive examinations for recruiting officials in 1962.

The problems between the cabinets and the Commission administration were highlighted for the first time in the Spierenburg Report (1979). The report drew attention to the proliferation of cabinet members, making special reference to dangers such as "reducing the morale of the civil service and creating a barrier between the Commissioner and the DGs" (Donnelly & Ritchie 1994, p.43). These concerns were not taken on board and EC cabinet advisers came to be increasingly regarded as constituting a shadow bureaucracy having 'too many pimply boys with too much power' (Wille 2013 p. 100). When in 1999 the Santer College collapsed under allegations of corruption, the new Commission President, R. Prodi set the goal of making cabinets smaller and more multinational. Much like the Copernicus reform in 2000 in Belgium, the Kinnock-Prodi reform was an attempt to radically restructure strategic and management practices in the European Commission. However, unlike Belgium, where Brans and Steen (2007) argued "cabinets were re-invented", in the case of the EC it has been argued that relations were "normalised" moving away from the private offices of the early Commission (1958-1962) and the political offices of pre Prodi - Kinnock reform period, to the professional offices of today (Wille 2013, p. 102).

3.2 Post Prodi political-administrative relations

After the Prodi – Kinnock reform there seems to be wide scholarly agreement that political-administrative relations at the EC level are not as dramatic as described in the literature before the reform, and definitely not as conflicting as those at the national level (Egeberg and Heskestad 2010, Kassim et al 2013, Wille 2013, Bauer and Ege 2013,).

A cabinet member expressed the following opinion, which seems to be shared across most cabinet members:

'[…] although the cabinet system is inspired by the French administrative tradition, we do also have borrowed elements from the British system, in the sense that we consider the institution of civil service to be 'sacred'. We completely respect the bottom-up approach, i.e. the fact that it is the civil service that capture, initiate and execute policies […] What the cabinets do is filtering the ideas of the services'.

[Interview Respondent 1]

"For us, good working relations with the DGs are a key to success. If you engage in a conflictual relationship, then you will have more problems than necessary. So, it is in the interest of the EC to establish a good working relationship. However, I am not sure if this presupposes a depoliticized Commissioner. In fact, good relations presuppose two things: first, loyalty of the DG, i.e. respect to the political decisions taken; second, respect to the technical expertise of the DGs, on the part of the Commissioner. As you can see, it is a double-way street, but, again, I do not think that the Commissioner has to be depoliticized. He/she is a political person who gives the strategic vision and guidance and then needs to put it into place. In order to implement it, the loyalty of the civil service is needed."

[Interview Respondent 3]

Nevertheless, this is not to say that pressure for political responsiveness does not exist.

'*[…] we occasionally have to 'tame' the over-ambitious proposals coming from the bureaucratic apparatus, which sometimes does not take into account crucial contextual factors and implications*

Moreover, conflict and internal upheaval is also part of the relations between EC cabinets and DG's. This is how an adviser described interaction with the EC administration:

"Internal upheaval sometimes happens, this is not always bad. I think the rules are very clear. There are some things that the Commission is politically responsible for and, also, there are hierarchical relations. I cannot tell anybody in a DG to do anything, as it is the Directors-General that tell them. If he/she does not agree with what we tell, he/she can speak to the Commissioner. This is the theory. In practice, the Commissioner is just a person, just like the Director-General. We cannot channel everything through them. So, our role is to keep in touch with people who do the work. Obviously, if they don't like what we are telling them, he can do it in their own way, but still they have to do it. However, they sometimes raise the issue on a high level and then we discuss the issue both with the DGs and the Commissioner. In most cases this does not happen. If I see that something does not work or happen at all at the DG level, I can discuss it with other people, or even the Commissioner. This is not a threat, but people at the DGs know that when they speak to me, they also speak, in the long run, with the Commissioner. Generally speaking, though, it is not my responsibility. This is where hierarchy [DG] is present."

Despite some tension, a fundamental difference to other cabinet systems is that EC cabinets do not command and control the administration in the same way that this found in cabinets forming shadow administrations, as is the case of Greece or Belgium (Gouglas 2013, Brans and Steen 2007).

What explains this normalisation of political-administrative relations in the Commission? To begin with, since 1999 we observe the drafting of Codes of Conduct from the President's office. The 1999 Prodi Code of Conduct (1999, p.2) governing relations between the Commissioners and their departments (DGs) made clear that they "…should be based first and foremost on loyalty and trust", introducing certain guidelines for cooperation between the cabinets and the services. Such guidelines, setting the framework of co-operation between Commissioners' cabinets, Commission services and other EU institutions, have been common since then. In his note to the new Commissioners in 2010, Barroso made clear that "They [Members of the Commission and Director Generals concerned] work together in a spirit of loyalty and mutual assistance, in keeping with their respective powers ... The cabinet does not involve itself in the direct management of the services, which is the exclusive responsibility of the Director-General" (Communication from the President 2010, p. 150. As important as they may be, though, such normalisation of PA relations in the Commission is arguably not simply a matter of codes of conduct.

Wille's (2013, p. 115, 116) thesis on the "normalisation of the commissioners' cabinets" portrays a gradual historical evolution from cabinets as private offices, to cabinets as political offices and finally to professional ones. This is due to their denationalisation, but also to a greater focus on effective management of the policy making process, "focused in delivering a Europe of results". The denationalisation argument, as a source of decreasing politico-administrative tension, comes up in the literature by most authors. Kassim et al (2013) have argued that the Prodi and Barroso reforms made EC cabinets more 'European' and less national in composition, with tangible effects on their relations with the administration. The EC cabinets are seen as having undergone a process of 'functional denationalization', triggered jointly by the reforms, the expansion of the College with the 2004 and 2007 enlargement, and the growing range of the EC responsibilities. As a result, Kassim et al (2013) argue that EC cabinets today tend to focus more on the policy portfolio of their Commissioner and less on impetuses emanating from national capitals. In other words, their role as a channel through which the Commissioner home state pursues its interests has significantly waned (Kassim et al, 2013).

Beyond denationalisation, it has been argued that the Kinnock reform with its new highly formalised recruitment and selection management system significantly reduced direct politicisation (Bauer and Ege 2013, p. 181-187). In contrast to the eighties, it is now much harder for loyalists to occupy top administrative positions. At the same time professional politicisation, that is the responsiveness of the Commission administration to the political requirements of their job has increased (Bauer and Ege 2013, p. 187-191). The Commission is a "political organisation" and the Commission officials can be viewed as "political bureaucrats" (Bauer and Ege 2013, p. 188). This appears to follow a trend towards greater political responsiveness on behalf of the College of Commissioners. It is claimed that the increasing importance of the European Parliament (EP) in the European system has a major impact on the political leadership of the EC, as the College has become more politicized and centralized in its quest to address a variety of political interests and to guarantee the adequate leadership required by the Commission's increasingly political role (Bauer & Ege, 2013). In this sense, the authors describe the EC as a system with an ever less politicized civil service, in an ever more politicized organizational context.

3.2 EC cabinets: organisation and advisers' status

In terms of formal organisation, EC cabinets do not fundamentally differ to the pre-Kinnock reform ones or to those in other ministerial cabinet systems. On top there is the Head of Cabinet (chef de cabinet), followed by the Deputy Head (deputy chef) and the Members of Cabinet, which may come under this very position title, or may be titled 'Advisers' or 'Experts' in case "*they are very senior in terms of experience, age or professional position*" and 'Personal or Policy Assistants' in case they are "*more junior*" [Interview Respondent 1]. This constitutes the so called core cabinet. Next to the core cabinet stands the rest of the cabinet, comprising Administrative Assistants, but also Spokespersons, Press Officers and (in some cases) interns (stagiaires).

As is usually the case with all known ministerial cabinet systems, the internal division of labour is flexible with the Commissioner and the *chef de cabinet* deciding on how to make use of their staff. As a result the formal job position presented above, make up only an initial indication of who has the status of an adviser and actually performs advisory duties. Our snapshot of the EC cabinet staff employed in May 2014 shows that on the one hand senior executive secretaries may be assigned the title of 'Member of Cabinet'. More often, though, it is 'Personal/Policy assistants', the ones who despite having an assistant staff contract (AST), happen to hold a substantial advisory portfolio. As a cabinet member pointed:

"*there is flexibility … one would expect AST's not to have leading roles, but it is often the case that they have an auxiliary role, while at the same time also following important portfolios of other cabinets*"

[Interview Respondent 1]

This is similar to what has been observed to be the case in Greece, where the '*Metaklitoi*' (usually an administrative support staff employment status) can be found to perform advisory duties and hold de facto an adviser status (Gouglas 2013a, 2013b, 2014). In France, a similar divide exists between '*Membres de Cabinet*' and the '*Fonctions Support*' (Gouglas 2014). In view of this, the present study focuses on EC cabinet staff, who perform advisory duties independent of official position title. These make up the de facto core cabinet advisers.

3.3 EC cabinets: size, composition, recruitment

The thrust of the Prodi – Kinnock Reform in relation to the EC cabinet system was that it formally reduced the maximum number of cabinet members, from nine to six per Commissioner, while it also insisted on the multinational character of every cabinet, "including at least three nationalities, apart from that of the commissioner" (Wille 2013, p. 101). In addition, all Commissioners are required to appoint a head or deputy head from a member state other than their own. Finally, the achievement of a gender balance became also a formal constraint to modern Commissioners.

It is debatable whether the new regime led to a significant decrease in the number of total cabinet staff in the whole of the Commission. It did, however, result in a stabilisation of cabinet size. We saw above that in 1995 the budget allowed for 310 total cabinet staff (including administrative support) in 20 Commission cabinets. In 2014 we counted a total of 621 cabinet staff in 28 Commission cabinets. This is more than Belgium's 564 total cabinet staff in 18 cabinets in March 2014 (Brans, De Visscher, Gouglas forthcoming). But it is much less than Greece's 1,200 in 2012, not to mention France's 2,903 staff in 39 cabinets in 2012 (Gouglas 2013a, Économie et Finances 2013, p. 9). As far as the number of core cabinet advisers is concerned, in May 2014 this stood at 229 in comparison to a much higher number in Belgium, at 448, and a much higher number in France, at 525 (Brans, De Visscher, Gouglas forthcoming, Économie et Finances 2013, p. 9). The average number of core cabinet advisers stood at around 8, while the average total cabinet size

stood at 22, if we include the bigger cabinet of the President (40) and that of the Commissioner for Foreign Affairs (36), and at 21 if we exclude those two residual cases.

Table 1: Comparison of cabinet size

Cabinet Sytem	Number of Cabinets	Total Number of Cabinet Staff	Total Number of Advisers	Average total cabinet size	Average Total number of advisers per cabinet
Belgium Snapshot March 2014	18	564	448	29.7	18.5
European Commission snapshot May 2014	28	621	229	22.2	8,2
France Snapshot August 2012	39	2903	525	74.4	13.5
Greece snapshot December 2012	37	Est. 1200	NA	32.4	Statutory 9 minimum to 34 maximum 4 Special Advisers or Sp. Associates 5 Scientific Associates (5 or 10 or 14 or 30)

It has been argued that the new regime has been more successful in denationalising commissioners' cabinets than reducing their size. As Egeberg and Heskestad (2010) showed the composition of cabinets is highly multinational marking a significant break with the past. In 2004, 96% of the cabinets were made up of more nationalities than prescribed by the rules. However, we need to point out that certain EC cabinets do still project a certain ingenuity in evading the new restrictions. This is evident in an internal note distributed by Commission President Barroso to the then new Commissioners. In that note it is underlined that many cabinets are still too nationally oriented. (Wille 2013, p. 94). Finally, regarding gender balance, though the difference is not huge, we observe that in our population snapshot of May 2014 men with 128 advisers overtake women who count 101 advisers.

Regarding the rules pertaining the composition of EC cabinets a member of cabinet commented:

"I think that the rules are properly implemented. At least this is what I would conclude by looking at the cabinets around me. Regarding gender balance, though it is not really about a one-by-one mathematics, we have many women in leading positions here in the EC."

[Interview Respondent 3]

Beyond nationality, Spence (2006, p.65) pointed out that "EC cabinets are usually a mixture of internal EC staff, seconded to the cabinet for the Commission's five-year term, and 'outsiders', on secondment from national administrations or the private sector". The insiders are usually

Commission officials, who typically see the passage through a Commissioner's cabinet as a key for a successful further career in the EC. As regards the outsiders, they are appointed directly by the Commissioner, on the basis of a contractual arrangement. In our sample of advisers, the vast majority, 12 out of 16 have had previous policy work experience from work within the EU institutions.

Table 2: EC cabinet advisers' previous policy work experience

Previous work experience description
Anti-Trust case officer
Administrator in one of the Commission's department
Was working in a DG in the Commission.
Head of Unit in the European Commission
Adviser to a previous Commissioner, Case officer DG COMP, Desk Officer in DG ENTR
Commission Official in Commissioner's DG
Head of Unit
MEP assistant
Council secretariat official
Policy Officer (Economics)
DG Political Officer, Political Advisor European Parliament
EU official for 10 years

3.4 Non cabinet advisers: 'Special Advisers'

Parallel to every EC cabinet we occasionally observe the presence of 'Special Advisers'. According to Article 5 of CEOS a 'Special Adviser' is 'a person who, by reason of his/her special qualifications and notwithstanding gainful employment in some other capacity, is engaged to assist one of the institutions of the Communities, either regularly or for a specified period'. 'Special Advisers' are persons of exceptional qualifications and/or relevance, quality and level of the professional experience and expertise acquired prior to or while performing the duties of special adviser. Normally, 'Special Advisers' are relatively older compared to the core cabinet advisers, while they have also worked, or are still working, in very prestigious posts. They may be in paid or non-paid duty and in most cases they are assigned parts of the portfolio that are technical in nature and, therefore, require high-level skills for their analysis. In the Barroso Commission in May 2014, there were employed 50 'Special Advisers' in total, their numbers ranging to none for certain EC Cabinets (Digital Agenda) to 4 for the Commission President to a maximum of 6 for Economic and Monetary Affairs. Overall 18 out of 28 Commissioners have appointed 'Special Advisers'. As those agents are outside the official cabinet structure and at times work part time or without pay, we decided not to include them in the current investigation.

"Special advisers are not cabinet members. They usually are very experienced 'outsiders'. For example, we have a special adviser who has worked for forty years on a certain part of our portfolio. He probably knows more than the entire unit on this issue. Once or twice a year, we call this expert in in order to have an internal brainstorming and extract certain political messages. We therefore form a sort of think tank on the issues the Commissioner has a special interest in. These contacts have a very formal character."

[Interview Respondent 3]

4. Inside the cabinet: advisers and policy making

In the following section we focus on the details of advisers' involvement in policy making. We start by using the stages heuristic to locate advisers' activities to the discrete stages of the policy cycle. We then proceed with classifying advisers according to Connaughton's (2010a, 2010b) 4 adviser types, based on policy making roles. We proceed by analysing the dimension of advisers' policy advice giving activity using Maley's (2013) three arenas.

4.1 Advisers and the policy cycle

Advisers were asked to point out the exact stage of the policy cycle where they thought they spent most of their working time. As is the case with Greek ministerial advisers their role is particularly pronounced at the front end of the policy cycle, with 13 advisers out of 16 claiming to participate in agenda setting every day, while 10 claimed to participate in policy formulation daily and 4 at least once a week. In addition, similarly to Greek ministerial advisers, the majority of EC cabinet advisers in our sample appear to spend much of their time trying to put solutions into effect (9 daily and 3 at least once a week). However, in contrast to the Greek advisers, EC Cabinet advisers appear to spend more time in decision making (9 out of 14 on daily basis). On the other hand, EC Cabinet advisers appear to be less active in evaluating and monitoring policy with only 3 of them claiming to be spending time at this stage on a daily basis and 4 at least once a week, while 6 claim to only occasionally spend time in monitoring results. The more pronounced role of the Greek ministerial advisers at the evaluation and monitoring stage is explained, not by any more technical focus of their work, but by their profile as policy managers who steer and fix policy (Gouglas 2013a, 2013b, 2014 forthcoming). Overall, it may be argued that the findings on frequency of time spent at the various policy cycle stages, are consistent with a central feature of all ministerial cabinets, which is that as the institutional habitats of advisers they enjoy a central role in the "design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policy" (James 2007, p. 17).

Table 3: EC cabinet advisers and the policy cycle

Policy Cycle Stage	Never	A couple of times per year	Once a month	Once a week	Daily
Recognizing problems - setting agenda priorities	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)	**13 (81.3%)**
Proposing Solutions and formulating policies	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	**10 (62.5%)**
Deciding on the preferred course of action	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	3 (18.8%)	**11 (68.8%)**
Putting solutions into effect	0 (0%)	1 (6.3 %)	1 (6.3%)	4 (25%)	**8 (50%)**
Monitoring results	0 (0%)	3	**6 (37.5%)**	4 (25%)	3 (18.8%)

		(18.8%)			

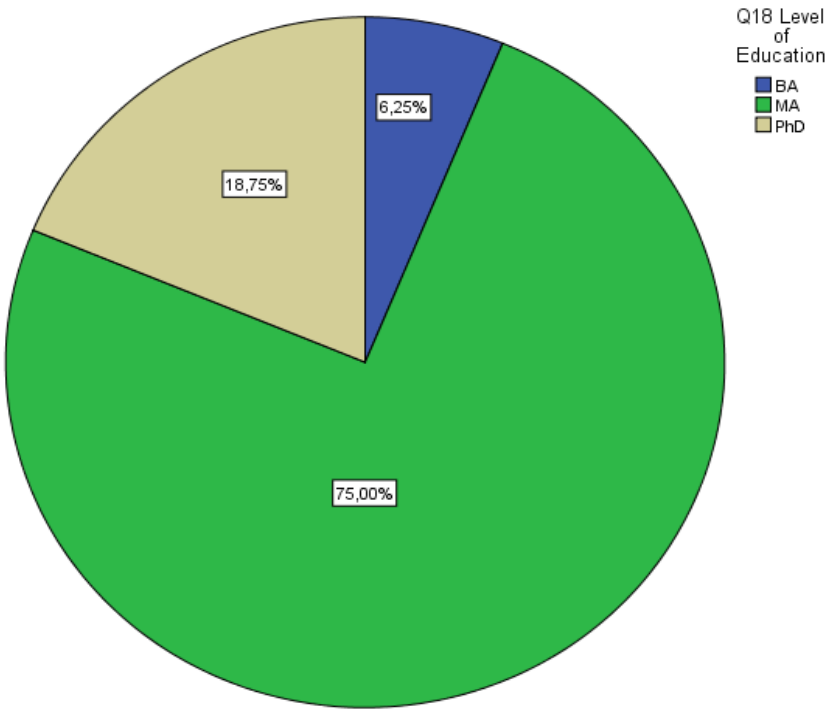
4.2 A classification of policy advisory roles

We now proceed in classifying EC Cabinet advisers according to the four policy advisory roles suggested by Connaughton (2010, 2010b, 2013): the expert, the partisan, the coordinator and the minder. We achieve this by using collected data on policy expertise, primary job functions, frequency of activities undertaken and frequency of tasks performed. The aim is to describe the main characteristics of advisers' roles, suggested as important by the typology: profile (specialist, generalist or responsive), politics (active, passive or variable), communication (technical, political or both), policy making (knowledge, politics or fixer) and impact (expertise, political dominance, management or mutuality). Where data exists we triangulate our questionnaire findings with interview material.

Profile

Is the profile of the EC cabinet ministerial adviser that of a specialist, a generalist or is it simply responsive to the minister's mission? As the typology suggests, a specialist is a qualified expert in a specific policy field relevant to a ministry's competencies, not a technical expert in a certain domain of competence. In view of this, we asked advisers to describe whether, according to the work they do in the Cabinet, they felt they fit in more appropriately to the role of a generalist or that of a specialist. Based on their answers, the majority, 11 respondents out of the 16 of our sample, describe themselves as generalists and only 5 as specialists. Given that ministerial cabinet system advisers have been described as conforming principally to the expert type, as opposed to the strategic adviser found for instance in the UK or the assistant / aide found for instance in Denmark, the above finding appears puzzling (Schreurs et al 2010). It needs not be. The majority of the advisers of our sample do project a high level of expertise, be it in terms of level of education (figure 4) or in relation to previous experience from working at the EU institutions (table 1 above), especially the European Commission.

Figure 3: Level of education



However, as Walgrave, Caals, Suetens and De Swert (2004, p.13) have argued for the case of Belgian ministerial cabinet advisers, "specialist expertise can only be assessed on the basis of the departmental stability of the MC activity". In their study of Belgian advisers from 1970 to 1999, they found that members of cabinets, despite their high expertise "do not show much homogeneity in the ministerial portfolios they serve" (Walgrave et al 2004, p.13). Ministerial cabinet advisers are not devoted in one policy branch, the one of their expertise, but alter positions frequently, demonstrating a high level of competence mobility. It may be argued that what we also observe in the case of EC Cabinet advisers, as with Greek and Belgian ministerial advisers, is this phenomenon of experts who are at the same time competence shifters.

As a member of cabinet stated

"*I, despite being an expert in competition law, was asked to follow the economic crisis*"

[Respondent 1]

Policy Making

Is the EC Cabinet adviser a fixer, facilitating the oversight of the ministry's agenda? Does the policy role of this actor rely on knowledge or politics? Or is the EC Cabinet adviser policy passive, simply minding the minister? In order to understand this we asked advisers to point and rank what they consider to be their three primary job functions. Additionally, we asked them to state the time spent in certain activities and tasks. As was also the case with Greek ministerial advisers, the data in hand reveal that EC Cabinet advisers are highly policy active. However, a fundamental difference to Greek advisers is that EC cabinet advisers appear to be equally active in both the steering, as well as the technical side of policy advice giving.

To begin with, in order to shed light into advisers' policy making activities, we asked them to point and rank what they consider it to be their three primary job functions. As advisers usually carry out multiple and overlapping functions the objective here was to reflect this very reality. In contrast to the Greek policy manager, who primarily appears to administer and manage projects, the EC Cabinet adviser appears to be more focused on the provision of strategic advice. 10 out of the 14 advisers of our sample rank provision of strategic advice as their number one function, while 4 advisers rank this as their second to top primary job function. All in all 14 out of the 16 advisers in our sample rank the provision of strategic advice within their top three primary job functions. This is followed by 8 advisers ranking advice on political considerations within their three top primary job functions. In particular, 5 advisers rank it as their second to top primary job function, while 3 advisers rank it as their top function. We need to stress at this point that the other 8 advisers in our sample do not rate advice on political considerations at all. This result pointing to a variable political role is in line with what we saw to be the case with Greek ministerial advisers too and will be further analysed further below. Finally 9 advisers rank "liaising with the European Commission" within their top three primary job functions. In particular, 7 advisers rank it as their third to top primary job function, while two of them rank it as their second to top primary job function. This in turn arguably reflects a main function of the EC cabinet system, which is to provide intra-executive political and policy co-ordination. But what is then the deal with the more technical aspect of policy making? 7 advisers in our sample rank involvement with the "nuts and bolts of policy" within their three top primary job functions, while 9 of them do not rank it at all. Evidently policy details appear to come up as important, but not as the most important job functions.

Beyond ranking their primary job functions, we asked EC Cabinet advisers to indicate the frequency of performing certain broad activities and then tasks (Table 3). While slightly less than half of the advisers in our sample do not perceive their involvement in the nuts and bolts of policy, as well as everyday management, to be their primary job function, the frequency of time spent in such activities tells a different story. 15 out of the 16 person sample of EC cabinet advisers appear

to spend much of their time in coordination and management, out of whom 11 on a daily basis. Moreover, 12 of them also appear to spend much of their time also in policy technicalities, out of which 6 on a daily basis.

In relation to time spent in specific activities we observe that the agents of our sample do not spend much time in media and communication. This is consistent with the perception they have of their primary job function, but also of the very fact that EC Cabinets have separate communication and media units performing such tasks. In relation to time spent in political activities, the answer is again consistent with their perception of their primary job function. 11 advisers out of the 14 in our sample state that they perform advising activities related to politics daily (5) or once every week (6).

Table 4: Frequency of activities undertaken by EC Cabinet advisers (%), n = 14

Activities	**Never**	**Several times per year**	**Once a month**	**Once a week**	**Every day**
Policy Technicalities (drafting or processing laws, researching, formulating solutions etc)	0	4 (25%)	0	**6 (37.5%)**	**6 (37.5%)**
Coordination and Management (of policy work, the Cabinet Staff, Civil Servants)	0	0	1 (6.3%)	4 (25%)	**11 (68.8%)**
Politics (Party, MPs, Minister's electoral district, Networking)	4 (25%)	0	1 (6.3%)	**6 (37.5%)**	5 (31.3%)
Media and Communication	**4 (25%)**	**4 (25%)**	1 (6.3%)	5 (31.3%)	2 (12.5%)

The data on frequency of tasks performed (see table 4) also shows that EC Cabinet advisers appear to be focused on steering tasks, as well as the nuts and bolts of policy making within their department.

Table 5: Tasks undertaken by EC Cabinet advisers and their frequency (%), n= 14

Tasks	**Never**	**Rarely**	**Occasionally**	**Frequently**	**Very frequently**
Ask officials to provide memos or advice	0	0	1 (6.3%)	8 (50%)	7 (43.8%)
Assist with budgetary matters	5 (31.3%)	7 (43.8%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	0
Attend meetings with Europe Commission's DG Civil Servants to discuss the nuts and bolts of policy	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (18.8%)	8 (50%)	5 (31.3%)
Broker meetings with interest groups	0	2	5 (31.3%)	7 (43.8%)	2 (12.5%)

		(12.5%)			
Convey or clarify Commissioner's wishes	0	0 (0%)	0	4 (25%)	12 (75%)
Meet with MEPs	0	3 (18.8%)	10 (62.5%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)
Analyse and Evaluate implemented Policy	0	1 (6.3%)	5 (31.3%)	8 (50%)	2 (12.5%)
Meet advisers from other EC cabinets	0	0	0	7 (43.8%)	8 (50%)
Meet with other EU institutions officials to coordinate policy	0	1 (6.3%)	9 (56.3%)	4 (25%)	1 (6.3%)
Write press statements	6 (37.5%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	0
Raise new policy initiatives with the Commissioner	0	0	4 (25%)	10 (62.5%)	2 (12.5%)
Read & comment on the administration's (DGs) advice	0	0	1 (6.3%)	8 (50%)	7 (43.8%)
Represent the Commissioner in internal meetings	0	0	2 (12.5%)	11 (68.8%)	3 (18.8%)
Represent the Commissioner in public events	0	3 (18.8%)	8 (50%)	5 (31.3%)	0
Write speeches	2 (12.5%)	6 (37.5%)	2 (12.5%)	6 (37.5%)	0
Receive external delegations on the Commissioner's behalf	0	0	7 (43.8%)	7 (43.8%)	2 (12.5%)
Prepare policy files and memos	0	1 (6.3%)	0	7 (43.8%)	8 (50%)
Monitor the implementation of policy	0	3 (18.8%)	5 (31.3%)	7 (43.8%)	1 (6.3%)
Produce evidence and facts in support of policy making	1 (6.3%)	6 (37.5%)	3 (18.8%)	5 (31.3%)	1 (6.3%)
Other (please specify)					

On the **steering side**, all advisers of our sample claim to frequently (7) and very frequently (7) ask officials to provide memos or advice on specific policy issues. 11 advisers claim to frequently (7 at least once a week) and very frequently (4 on daily basis) attend meetings with EU Commission DG's civil servants to discuss the nuts and bolts of policy. Virtually all of them spend time meeting advisers from other cabinets, though the majority, 9 advisers, rarely or occasionally meet with other EU institutions officials in order to coordinate policy. Finally, half of them frequently and very frequently monitor the implementation of policy (7). It is evident from the data in hand that much like Greek ministerial advisers, EC Cabinet advisers spend much time in performing policy steering tasks.

On the more **technical policy side** the majority of EC Cabinet advisers appear to read and comment on departmental advice frequently (4) and very frequently (5), analyse and evaluate implemented policy frequently (7) and very frequently, prepare policy files and memos frequently (5) and very frequently (7). Almost half of our sample's advisers (6) spend time in producing evidence and facts in support of policy making, though 8 appear to never, rarely or occasionally spend time in producing evidence and facts in support of policy making (8). Where advisers spend the least time, as is the case with Greek advisers, is assisting with budgetary issues. 10 advisers stated that they never or rarely assist with such issues.

Overall (table 5), in relation to the policy dimension of Connaughton's typology, it may be argued that EC Cabinet advisers, unlike their Greek counterparts, do not share the perception of working as policy managers, but rather as strategic advisers who also advice on political considerations and liaise with other parts of the Commission. However, much like their Greek counterparts, EC Cabinet advisers appear to be highly active in policy steering. A fundamental difference between the two groups of agents is that an equally big majority of EC Cabinet advisers appears to be more frequently involved (daily or weekly) in a wide range of policy technicalities and tasks.

As an interviewee put it

"Members of cabinet study and examine issues on behalf of the Commissioner, they explain, help him take a decision. They are experts, but can also be specialists. The coordinator is the Chief of Cabinet".

[Interview Respondent 1]

Table 6: EC cabinet advisers' policy making roles

Top 3 Primary Job Functions	Activities once a week and daily	Tasks performed once a week and daily
Strategic advice 14 (1st and 2nd) *Advice on political considerations* 8 (2nd and 3rd choice) But half do not rank it **Steering** *Liaising with the Commission* 9 (7 as 3rd choice) **Technical** *Nuts and bolts of policy* 7 (3 as 1st, 1 as 2nd and 3 as 3rd)	**Steering** Coordination and Management: 15 **Technical** Policy technicalities: 12	**Steering** 15 ask officials to provide memos or advice on specific policy issues. 15 meet advisers from other cabinets **Technical** 15 prepare policy files and memos 15 appear to read and comment on departmental advice 10 analyse and evaluate implemented policy 9 monitor the implementation of policy 6 spend time in producing evidence and facts in support of policy making, **Steering & Technical** 13 attend meetings with EU Commission DG's civil servants to discuss the nuts and bolts of policy

Politics

Is the EC Cabinet adviser's political role active, passive, or variable? From a ministerial cabinet system perspective we would be inclined to assume that EC Cabinet advisers would have a highly active almost partisan political role. However, given the *sui generis* nature of the European Commission as a political institution, as well as post the Prodi – Kinnock reforms affecting the Commission politico-administrative system, we would also be inclined to assume that this role, especially its partisan dimension would be weak in comparison to the typical ministerial cabinet systems. The data in hand confirms those two assumptions.

To begin with, the EC cabinet adviser in our sample is evidently neither a 'party apparatchik', nor a partisan of a national cause. When asked to point to the most important skills an adviser must possess to fulfil one's duties the majority of advisers in our sample claimed that same ideology and political preferences with the Commissioner appear to be of little importance with 9 advisers appearing to consider this not at all or least important. Even less important appears to be having the same nationality as the Commissioner, with 15 advisers claiming this is not at all (12) or least important (3).

As argued by a member of cabinet during our interview, the last type of adviser to be found in an EC Cabinet is the partisan.

"… however, we are less partisans. This is because, in our case, the Commissioner is not going to return (to her constituency). Even her appointment was not based on party affiliations but rather on her popularity and expertise. So we generally do not have to do much on this field. Of course, some of my colleagues are assigned to monitor the [national] media and the situation in the [country] because she is [nationality] and wants to be aware of these things".

[Interview Respondent 2]

According to another member of cabinet:

"*Commissioners usually do bring one single partisan, responsible for constituency work back home, but this is usually it*".

[Interview Respondent 1]

Being not partisan does not mean that EC cabinet advisers are politically passive. We saw above that half of the advisers in our sample consider the provision of advice on political considerations as one of their primary job functions. Furthermore, as depicted in table 3 above, 11 / 16 advisers claim they are frequently or very frequently involved in activities of a political nature. This is further supported by data on frequency of political tasks undertaken (Table 6).

Table 7: Frequency of political tasks performed

Tasks	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very frequently
Convey or clarify Commissioner's wishes	0	0	0	**4 (25%)**	**12 (75%)**
Meet with MEPs	0	3 (21.4%)	**10 (62.5%)**	2 (14.3%)	1 (7.1%)

Meet advisers from other EC cabinets	0%	0	0	**7 (43.8%)**	**8 (50%)**
Represent the Commissioner in internal meetings	0	0	2 (12.5%)	**11 (68.8%)**	**3 (18.8%)**
Represent the Commissioner in public events	0	3 (21.4%)	**8 (50%)**	5 (31.3%)	0
Receive external delegations on the Commissioner's behalf	0	0	**7 (43.8%)**	**7 (43.8%)**	2 (12.5%)
Raise new policy initiatives with the Commissioner	0	0	**4 (37.5%)**	**10 (62.5%)**	2 (12.5%)

The EC Cabinet adviser appears to be well aware of his/her political role

"There is party politics around. Maybe not on every policy file, but on some important files there are clear political nuances. We have to remember that the EC is a political institution. It has to defend its line vis-à-vis the Parliament, which is aligned and divided in political parties. So, when it comes to pushing a file, it is natural for the Commissioner to go to his political group and ask for its support. So, it is part of the Commissioner's job to also engage with the political parties. In this sense, the party of his/her own 'colour' is likely to be the Commissioner's natural ally. However, he/she has to work with the other groups of the EP as well. On this purpose, various communication channels are used".

[Interview Respondent 3]

"*The Adviser needs to have political experience and skills. This is more important than detailed policy knowledge*" [Questionnaire respondent 12].

However, it would be premature to argue at this point that the average profile of the EC cabinet adviser is that of an always highly politically active agent. Their political role appears more variable as half of the advisers in our sample do not consider advice on political considerations as falling within their three top primary job functions. Whether active or not very much depends on the portfolio they are handling, but also the Commissioner

"I believe it very much depends on the Commissioner's personal choice. However, I find it more likely than unlikely that the Commissioner, at least for the people assigned with the management of the cabinet (i.e. Head/Deputy Head of cabinet), he/she will make sure that the political affiliation is the same as his/her own one. I personally know a few Head of cabinets who are probably more of an expert type of adviser. Of course, in these cases political affiliation is secondary. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that Commissioners also look at this issue".

[Interview Respondent 3]

Communication

Having analysed the relevant data on the profile, policy and political role of EC cabinet advisers, we now proceed into analysing data concerning a fourth characteristic, their communication role. Does it reflect political or technical characteristics, or maybe both? On the more **political side** we already saw above (table 8) that all of the advisers surveyed appear to convey or clarify the Commissioner's wishes, while the majority represents the Commissioner in internal meetings and half of them occasionally in public events too. Moreover, the majority meets advisers from other cabinets in order to coordinate policy and deal with cross-cutting issues that transcend the Commissioner's portfolio boundaries. This political aspect of advisers' communication role is further corroborated by their perception that "speaking in public" is an important and very important skill an EC cabinet adviser must possess. In addition, as one of our respondents pointed:

"*resilience (working under pressure and with incomplete information)"* and *"'presentability' (meetings with ministers, senior private sector representatives)"* appear to be two valuable skills an adviser must possess in order to do the job properly

[Questionnaire respondent 2].

Moving now to communication in its narrow sense and despite the fact that "Press and Media" staff have been deliberately left out of our investigation, we observe that "speech writing" is considered rather unimportant. However, paradoxically, it comes up as a type of text to which 10 out of 15 advisers frequently and very frequently contribute. A lesser number, 7 advisers, contribute frequently and very frequently in writing up press-statements (table 7).

Table 8: Frequency of contribution per type of text

	Never	**Rarely (once a year)**	**Occasionally (once a month)**	**Frequently (once a week)**	**Very frequently/ on a daily basis**
Strategy Plans and Policy Reports	0	1 (6.3%)	3 (18.8%)	**8 (50%)**	**5 (25%)**
Policy Memos	0	0	4 (25%)	**6 (37.5%)**	**6 (37.5%)**
Legislative proposals	0	3 (18.8%)	6 (37.5%)	3 (18.8%)	3 (18.8%)
Speeches	0	1 (6.3%)	4 (25%)	**6 (37.5%)**	**4 (25%)**
Press Statements	0	3 (18.8%)	5 (31.3%)	6 (37.5%)	1 (6.3%)

We see from the table above that contribution in strategy plans and policy reports, as well as policy memos is more frequent. This in turn reflects the technical side of advisers' communication roles. This technical side of their communication role is also evident when we analyse the frequency of tasks performed. There we observe that all advisers in our sample appear to frequently and very frequently ask officials to provide memos or advice, they comment on the advice they receive, while the majority attends meetings with EC officials to talk about the nuts and bolts of policy (table 5). To conclude, based on the data above it may be argued that the communication role of the EC cabinet adviser surveyed reflects both technical and political characteristics.

Impact

Having analysed data on advisers' profile, policy, political and communication roles we should now be able to analyse the final characteristic, crucial for the typology, advisers' impact. Is the impact of EC cabinet advisers mainly expertise, politics, management or mutuality? While in the Greek case the impact appeared quite clearly to be management, the picture here is rather blurry. Evidently their impact is not politics in the partisan definition of the term. On one hand, EC cabinet advisers appear to be highly qualified experts with significant previous policy work experience in the EU, and mainly the European Commission itself. However, the phenomenon of competence mobility / competence shifting means that they do not necessarily work in the policy field of their specialisation. They do give great emphasis, though, on acquiring and using knowledge for policy formulation. On the other hand, EC cabinet advisers seem to have a significant twofold impact: a) management, as they perform significant policy steering tasks. Here they are similar to their Greek counterparts. b) mutuality, as they are politically alert, looking actively for politically harmful issues to the Commissioner's agenda.

Conclusion: Experts, Minders, Co-ordinators or Partisans?

Where does this all leave us in relation to Connaughton's (2010b) typology? Our work would have been much easier if we were investigating EC special advisers. They most definitely fit the ideal type of the expert type of adviser. However, in relation to the EC core cabinet advisers, who are the focus of our investigation, the data in hand illustrate that there is no fixed type of adviser. Asking a member of cabinet to explicitly comment on the various types of advisers that may be present in the EC cabinet, we got the following answer:

"I think we are all of them … I believe we perform all of the other three roles, depending on what is the case. For example, if we have a communication regarding some data on the economy, I am expected to be a minder, a coordinator and an expert as well. On a given day, I may do more of this or that type of function, but there will always be a mixture of all these roles".

[Interview Respondent 2]

Indeed advisers perform multiple roles and this is in line with what we know from empirical research in other national administrative and executive traditions. In table 8 below we can see a summary of the characteristics of the EC cabinet adviser and how do these compare to those of their Greek counterparts. Interpreting the data we could argue that the advisers surveyed principally conform to a hybrid between the co-ordinator and the minder roles, projecting also strong elements of the expert type. This is different to the Greek case, where advisers appear to principally conform to the pure co-ordinator type.

Table 9: Classification of EC cabinet adviser according to policy role

Cabinet System	PROFILE	POLITICAL	COMMUNICATE	POLICY MAKING	IMPACT	ROLE
EC	Generalist (co-ordinator), but highly qualified experts with significant EC experience (co-ordinator)	Variable (co-ordinator)	Communicate both in technical and political terms (co-ordinator)	Value knowledge and technical policy side (expert), but also strong fixer element (co-ordinator Hybrid: expert / co-ordinator	Impact is expertise (expert) and management (co-ordinator), but also mutuality (minder)	Hybrid Coordinator and minder with elements of the expert type
Greece	**Generalist**	**Variable**	**Both political and technical**	**Fixer**	**Management**	**Coordinator**

4.2 Dimension of advice: the three arenas

We now move on to examine the arenas in which advisers' policy work is more pronounced. The question here is the following: which arena(s) constitutes the core part of their work and which represents more of an opportunity than responsibility? Working with the department (1st arena), working within the executive (2nd arena) or working with stakeholders (3rd arena) (Maley 2013)? The overview of the frequency of tasks performed in each of the three arenas (table 9) shows that except for working with the department (1st arena) and within the executive (2nd arena), working also with stakeholders forms core part of the advisers' policy role.

Table 10: Frequency of tasks performed in the three arenas

Arenas	Tasks	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very frequently
1sr arena: working with the department Vertical Arena	Ask officials to provide memos or advice	0	0	0	**7 (50%)**	**7 (50%)**
	Convey or clarify Commissioner's wishes	0	0 (0%)	0	**4 (28.6%)**	**10 (71.4%)**
	Attend meetings with European Commission's DG Civil Servants to discuss the nuts and bolts	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (21.4%)	**7(50%)**	**4(28.6%)**

	of policy					
	Represent the Commissioner in internal meetings	0	0	2 (12.5%)	**11 (68.8%)**	**3 (18.8%)**
	Read & comment on the administration's (DGs) advice	0	0	1 (6.3%)	**8 (50%)**	**7 (43.8%)**
2nd arena: working within the executive **Intra-executive coordination**	Meet advisers from other EC cabinets	0%	0	0	**6 (42.9%)**	**7 (50%)**
3rd arena: working with stakeholders **Horizontal Arena**	Meet with MEPs	0	3 (21.4%)	**8 (57,1%)**	2 (14.3%)	1 (7.1%)
	Broker meetings with interest groups	0	1 (7.1%)	5 (35.7%)	**6 (42.9%)**	**2 (14.3%)**
	Meet with other EU institutions officials to coordinate policy	0 (0%)	0	**8 (57,1%)**	3 (21.4%)	1 (7.1%)
	Receive external delegations on the Commissioner's behalf	0	0	**7 (50%)**	**5 (35.7%)**	**2 (14.3%)**
	Represent the Commissioner in public events	0	3 (18.8%)	**8 (50%)**	5 (31.3%)	0

To begin with, as expected in all systems, working with the department makes up indeed the thrust of advisers' work. We already saw the technical and political aspects of EC advisers' some of which are depicted in table 10 above. In respect to supervising, orienting, mobilising and developing ideas within the department a member of cabinet commented:

[…] we are in daily contact with the Directors-General and the Directors. […] In practice, cabinets can impose certain positions to the services, encourage the initiation of a policy draft or express their disapproval of the scope of a given proposal. This is day-to-day business for us'.

[Interview Respondent 1]

Asked to comment on the top-down and bottom-up generation of policy ideas another member of cabinet replied:

"Sometimes proposals find their way bottom-up, while sometimes the Commissioner distinguishes a priority and tries to push it in a top-down manner. On the one side, there are these weekly meetings between the services and the cabinets where we basically discuss the most salient issues and get bottom-up policy advice. On the other side, the Head of a cabinet, representing the Commissioner, can encourage the launch of an initiative and ask for the opinion of the civil service, i.e. write a note. Finally, top-down and bottom-up approaches co-exist, without excluding each other."

[Interview Respondent 3]

In addition, as we can observe from the frequency of meetings with other advisers, working within the executive is also part of the core policy work of EC cabinet advisers. This is in line with what we know on the decision-making and co-ordination mechanisms inside the Commission, whereby the "Commissioners' agenda is always considered at a weekly meeting of the heads of the Commissioners' cabinets" while "feeding into *chefs de cabinet* meetings are the outcomes of meetings between the cabinet members responsible for particular policy areas" (Nugent 2010, p. 120). Indeed our interviews corroborated this.

"*There are regular meetings among advisers and every Monday the chefs de cabinet meet in order to prepare the meeting of the College of Commissioners that takes place every Wednesday*"

[Exploratory Interview with Policy Assistant]

Where the EC cabinet system appears to differ to the Greek, but also the Australian case, is in relation to working with stakeholders. In the EC cabinet context, working with stakeholders in order to bargain, link ideas to interests and opportunities, and build political support, appears to represent an institutional responsibility, rather than just an opportunity that advisers can grab according to their individual capacity and background.

Asking a member of cabinet to comment on working within the executive and in particularly stakeholders we got the following reply

"Our cabinet interacts with a wide range of actors. We usually get a huge amount of requests to meet with stakeholders, to deliver speeches on behalf of the Commissioner, to represent him/her in a political context in the EP, at workshop level with MEPs etc. I think it is one of the prime tasks and this is why cabinets should be composed of people who are able to perform in public."

[Interview Respondent 3]

This finding is further corroborated by the value our sample of respondents attach to "negotiation" as fundamental skill an adviser must possess in order to be successful in the job. 12 out of the 16 advisers of our sample consider it a very important and most important skill. Moreover, half of the advisers in our sample consider "networking with other EU institutions" as either a very or most important skill.

Central to the role of co-ordination is the head of cabinet who appears to play a major negotiating, brokering and bargaining role in all three arenas. As a member of cabinet put it:

"the major coordinating role is performed by the head of cabinet: he is the responsinble for the communication between the Commissioner and the cabinet, the internal coordination of the cabinet and the interactions with the other cabinets"

[Interview Respondent 1]

Conclusion

In the present study we investigated the phenomenon of EC cabinet advisers in the policy making process. We started by employing an institutional focus, describing the institutional habitat of those agents, the EC cabinet, as well as the politico-administrative context in which the EC cabinet is embedded. We proceeded by focusing on the individual agents' policy work. First, we briefly highlighted the policy cycle stage where advisers' work is more prominent, and we then proceeded with classifying EC advisers' policy work using Connaughton's (2010a, 2010b) 4 adviser types and Maley's (2013) three arenas.

On the institutional front, we observed that EC advisers belong to cabinets and that the EC cabinet model shares important similarities with other ministerial cabinet systems, like that of France, the model of which was followed by practitioners in the early Commission, but also those of Belgium, and Greece. On the similarities front, we see that EC cabinets:

- Were established in particular historical and political circumstances as institutions that could promote a dynamic and fluid system of policy advice. Much like in other systems their main functions were co-ordination and the combination of the pooling of expertise with political feasibility. To be more specific they were set up to improve both horizontal and vertical co-ordination within the Commission, emphasize the political role the Commission was to play in the creation of European political union, act as pools of expertise, as well as build policy majorities and package deals across Community institutions and with the Member States.
- Employ flexibility in relation to their exact organisation, allocation of tasks and internal division of labour.
- Are big as far as total cabinet staff numbers are concerned: bigger than Belgium, but smaller than Greece and France
- Play a key role in the provision of policy advice just like their French, Belgian and Greek counterparts. EC Cabinets are "central to policy making and political processes of the Community" and as such operate within a complex web of European "institutions and are a focus of lobbying from sectoral and national interests" (Donelly and Ritchie 1994, p. 40).

Yet, the important changes implemented after the Prodi – Kinnock reform, combined with the particularities of the EU supranational administration, have resulted to the EC cabinet system projecting certain fundamental differences.

- To begin with, contrary to total cabinet size, the number of core cabinet advisers is significantly smaller than that of the French, the Belgian and the Greek ones.
- The establishment of Codes of Conduct, a practice developed and usually found in Westminster systems, has been adopted as a way to draw a sharp line of responsibility between cabinets and services
- Unlike any other system, there are strict restraints regarding the composition of EC cabinets in terms of nationality and gender balance. "Party politics plays hardly and national politics little role" (Bauer and Ege 2013, p. 185).
- While they demand political responsiveness and the Commission high civil service does come as politically aware and professionally politicised, EC cabinets are not any more the source of direct politicisation as this the case with most ministerial cabinet systems. The Commission administration appears "considerably depoliticised", "an ever less politicised civil service, in an ever more politicised organisational context" (Bauer and Ege 2013, p. 193). This is what has been described as a "normalised executive" (Wille 2013).

This particular political/administrative context, reflected in the particular EC cabinet arrangements does have implications for the role of EC Cabinet advisers in policy making. Focusing now on the

individual roles of those agents we observe that as expected in a ministerial cabinet system, advisers are highly active at all stages of the policy cycle. However, EC cabinet advisers do not dominate the policy process to the same extent that Greek ministerial advisers do, and to a certain extent also their Belgian or French counterparts, through the establishment of 'mini' or 'shadow' administrations. Thus the role of cabinets in the provision of policy advice is key, but not absolute. As Bauer and Ege (2013, p. 186) argued "Commission officials at all levels are ex officio involved in EU policy making". This was corroborated by our interview data according to which policy development appeared to be both a top down and bottom up process.

When it comes to classifying advisers' policy making roles, we observed that there is no fixed type of adviser. Based on the data in hand the advisers surveyed appear to principally conform to a hybrid between the co-ordinator and the minder roles, projecting also strong elements of the expert type. This is different to the Greek case, where advisers appear to principally conform to the pure co-ordinator type. In terms of profile, the EC cabinet adviser is an expert with significant previous work experience in the EU and especially the European Commission, but not necessarily a specialist, since s/he most often works in portfolios different than the field of specialisation. In this, the EC Cabinet adviser shares important similarities with the French members of cabinet, especially the seconded civil servant and ENA graduate to be found in abundance in the French *Cabinets Ministériels*, but also the Belgian competence shifters. In Greece too, we observe the phenomenon of competence mobility, though, in the Greek case the cabinet's balance tilts towards younger and less experienced outsiders. In the EC cabinet system, the only specialists, also fitting the ideal type of Connaughton's expert type in every other dimension are Special Advisers. Those actors, though, work outside the cabinet system and they have not been the focus of the present study. In relation to their policy role we observed that the EC cabinet adviser's work projects both steering and technical characteristics valuing both the injection of knowledge, as well as performing a role of "political watchdog". Their political role is variable, depending on their background, portfolio and the Commissioner, while their communication role appears to share both political and technical elements. Finally, their impact appears to be primarily co-ordination, followed by mutuality and expertise.

As far as the dimension of advisers' work is concerned, working with the department (1st arena) is obviously a core part of EC cabinet advisers' policy work. Supervision, orientation, mobilisation and development of policy is key. An important difference to advisers in other ministerial cabinet systems, is that the EC adviser does not command and control the administration. This makes the EC the only cabinet system in which this type of hierarchical command and control activity is particularly weak. This is turn positions EC advisers to the exact opposite of their American counterparts. While US advisers are the only non-cabinet system advisers to command and control the administration, EC cabinet advisers are the cabinet system advisers not to do this (OECD 2011, p. 30).

Moreover, as expected, our data shows that working within the executive is also a core part of advisers' policy work. This is consistent with a fundamental trait we find in ministerial cabinet systems: intra-executive co-ordination. As James (2007, p. 17) pointed cabinets facilitate inter-ministerial policy co-ordination, thanks to the formation of a strong network between cabinets. Referring to France, he points to the fact the cabinet staff settle inter-ministerial disagreements. In Belgium too cabinet staff serves as conduits of negotiating important policy decisions between ministers (Brans and Steen 2007). In the case of the EC, the bureaucracy of which has been described as extremely fragmented and with crucial co-ordination deficits, cabinet advisers are the main nods that appear to tie the system together.

Finally, in contrast to other systems, working with stakeholders appears to be an institutional responsibility for the EC cabinet adviser rather than simply an opportunity those actors can grab at will. We saw that the policy advice giving activities of the EC cabinet adviser reach out to a

complex web of interest groups and stakeholders. This in turn can be explained by the nature of lobbying, the logic of granting access to interest groups and the pattern of interest representation at the EU level. To begin with, interest groups and stakeholders seek to gain access to and influence the main EU institutions: the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and increasingly the European Parliament. Traditionally, the European Commission, and particularly lower civil servants who undertake most of the policy preparatory work at an early stage and have technical know-how, have been the main focus of lobbying activities. However, the Commissioner, the cabinet and high civil servants are also the targets of ad hoc high level lobbying. Lobbying, though, is not a unidirectional activity of interest groups versus the EU institutions, but it can be better seen as the exchange of resources between interdependent organizations. Interest groups seek access and influence, but EU institutions also want to interact with stakeholders, having as their goal the acquisition of information and knowledge, as well as building of support and legitimacy for the proposed policy. This is the logic of access described by Bouwen (2002, 2004, 2009). Finally, it may be argued that this logic of access is interlinked to an EU system of interest representation, which with the exception of social policy, can be better described as either neo-pluralist or elite pluralist (Hix, 2005, Coen 1997). In relation to the former, unlike corporatism, there is no privileged access of certain groups, but officials activate the relevant interest(s) in a specific policy issue. This happens through financial support or the use of informal rules and guidelines, such as the recent European Transparency Initiative. In relation to elite pluralism, interest groups and stakeholders are activated through committees and small expert groups (committee governance), hearings or roundtables, and institutionalised consultation fora (forum politics).

Where does it all leave us then in terms of empirically studying and theorising advisers and their policy making roles? In terms of empirics and not disregarding the limitation of the present work being still a work in progress, it can be argued that a first step in the direction of covering the empirical gap concerning EC cabinet advisers has been taken. In terms of theory the use of typologies has allowed us to reach a higher level of abstraction and also draw meaningful comparisons with other systems at this level. Important gaps left by the typology were covered by the employment of the policy cycle heuristic and Maley's (2013) concept of three arenas. However, despite reaching greater specificity through the use of various theoretical and empirical approaches, we still lack a single conceptual approach, able to weave the study of advisers together and as such facilitate a more methodological comparative study.

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